

501
SEASONABLE
REFLECTIONS,

Adapted to the Approaching

F A S T,

And recommended to the Attention of

CHRISTIAN PEOPLE,

The INHABITANTS more especially of
these Two Great CITIES.

I N A N

ADDRESS from a MINISTER
to his PARISHIONERS. *R.*

*Thus saith the LORD of Hosts, Consider your
ways.* Haggai i. 7.

L O N D O N :

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M DCC LXXVI.





SEASONABLE

REFLECTIONS, &c.

Beloved in the LORD,

THE great object of my concern, our common salvation, not only induces me to improve, as I can, the usual opportunities to your advantage, but excites the most fervent wish for an effectual application of whatever means may tend to secure this inestimable prize. Acts of humiliation and the penitential exercises, which are comprehended under *that* Christian discipline, whereunto as sinners we stand obliged, are, in the course of public instructions, pointed out as prudence may direct or occasion require. And these, to make them the more regarded, are enforced by an appeal to the awful sanctions of the Gospel of CHRIST.

But, besides this general view of the duty alluded to, there is a particular call to it sometimes made necessary in a public way, when, as a nation, our most important interests are at stake, and popular wickedness, (the most dangerous engine of destruction to

a state) compels its rulers to sound an alarm, and to urge, with suitable earnestness, popular contrition.

This is just now done under circumstances which are truly affecting, and have a powerful tendency, if our supineness is not inveterate, to rouse us into recollection, and to bring us back to God and our duty; to make us sincerely deprecate his wrath, implore his mercy, and obey his will. We must be very blindly partial to our own degeneracy, and the corruption of the age in which we live, if we do not allow the rectitude of the measure, and we must be unpardonably perverse if we do not, to the utmost of our power, every one concur to make it productive of personal happiness and public good.

A *general Fast* is a public act of penance, so marked with solemnity, that, if we think properly of God's majesty, and our own unworthiness, our depending interest, temporal and eternal, and what may really be the consequence to ourselves as we improve or abuse it, that we cannot with too much circumspection provide for the one, and guard against the other. Indeed if we do not meet the Day, and attend to its business with a becoming,

becoming, settled composure, and with determined resolution so as to cease from doing evil, and to engage in doing well, we are but aggravating a load of guilt, already far too great, and prostituting the dignity of his worship and service, who declares Himself by his Providence and Power, as well as by his Word, a G O D jealous of his honour, “ visiting the sins of the fathers upon the
 “ children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him, and shewing mercy unto thousands in them who
 “ love Him, and keep his Commandments.”

A declaration which, surely, can never be heard or read with indifference, and which, at this very time, merits from us the most reverential, the most entire regard.

The first reflection then which naturally strikes the mind with a view to this awful call, is the propriety of communing with our own hearts, of examining ourselves whether we are in the faith, whether we are so speculatively and practically, whether we embrace the christian doctrine, whether we hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, and prove by our fruits, the only trial of our sincerity fixed by our Redeemer, that we do so.

In order to a national reformation every individual must look first at home and be intent upon mending himself. To which purpose there should be a deliberate and close inspection into our own hearts and ways ; and whilst we consider God as the discernor of the one and the superintendant of the other, as knowing all that passes within or without us, we should deal openly with him and impartially with ourselves : for the leaven of hypocrisy even in the smallest degree will, like *Achan's* trespass in the accursed thing, spoil the whole act and leave us in a worse condition than we were before. Whatever enemies we discover within they must be brought forth and slain, and when we weep between the Porch and the Altar, our great care must be that our tears are the tears of sincerity and truth, that they testify our pain for and our abhorrence of our sins, and in result of every inward motion and every outward sign we must evince by an exemplary conduct that our return into the way of righteousness is not formal but real, and that we add in every sense, to our FAITH VIRTUE. This is, upon a general view of things, necessary. But upon a more particular attention to our times, and the common

men practices of the world, it must appear to be quite indispensable. It must more especially be so with respect to persons who are vested with any kind of authority, be it domestic or civil.

I would here wish to be more explicit by specifying in some very distinguishable and truly important points. The attending to the moral and religious training of children and servants, and consequently the enjoining and enforcing a just regard to laws as well human as divine ; the laying uniformly a proper stress upon family government and family devotion, the serious, regular, observance of the Christian Sabbath, not only in our own persons, but in those of our dependents, the carefully avoiding all undue expences and affectation of dress and parade in ourselves, and discouraging it all we can in others, the checking a fondness for pleasures, and the making it our earnest endeavour, (as we then by the help of frugality more easily and more frequently may) to comfort others with that comfort wherewith we are comforted of GOD.

A little enlargement upon these particulars is what I farther have in view ; and as it will be a certain satisfaction and relief to

my own mind to attempt making some good impressions under circumstances in themselves so awakening and awful, my hearty prayer to the Father of mercies is, that what is well intended may be well accepted and beneficially applied. Religion is the only sure basis of happiness whether temporal or eternal, it is the corner stone without which no building of this sort can be fitly framed, or have in it either beauty or duration. It is that without which, in plain terms, (the appeal lies to experience) there is no living with dignity and comfort in this world and no suitable preparation to be made for another. What then is the first thought which should strike us but the unspeakable importance of improving the earliest opportunities of placing every part of duty to God, our fellow creatures, and ourselves, in the most influencing view before those, whom, if we are not unnaturally indifferent to first incontestable principles, we must be inclined as well as obliged to preserve from misery and ruin, and to direct in the road to BLESSING and to HEAVEN. Our own offspring have a call upon us which nothing but extreme barbarity can resist; and others related to us in an inferior way, have a right in this respect which

which cannot be neglected without disobedience to the Christian law, without mischief to them and reproach to ourselves. Whence is it but from omissions of this kind, omissions indeed sadly countenanced by the customs of a degenerate day, that the too general depravity in the lower ranks of people arises, whence is it else but from profligate examples in higher life, and a total indifference in them under whom they act to the great interests of their nature that they become very frequently dissolute and abandoned? To what other source can we trace, much, very much, of the complaining in our streets. Be persuaded then seriously to lay to heart this great duty. Complicated good will result from it to them, to yourselves, to your country. It is the great and only effectual antidote against that licentiousness which has through a relaxation of authority in almost every view been long increasing amongst us, and which is in almost every sense, our present distinguished disgrace. Oppose to this prevailing contagion the powerful cure (for so it must be if universally adopted) of living quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty; and if POLITICS must be taught, teach them these, to
fear

fear God, to honour the King, to submit to every ordinance of man, for the LORD's and for CONSCIENCE SAKE ; to render to all their dues, to accuse no man falsely, to do violence to no man, to be content with their wages and in their stations, to put away, (to abhor) lying, and all misrepresentation, to speak the truth in love, to pray for the peace of *Jerusalem*, to pray that they may prosper who love her, that peace may be within her walls and plenteousness within her palaces, and solicitously to inculcate it upon them to seek, upon this especial motive because of the house of the LORD our God, to do her good. This is the best and most effectual charm by which to drive away those infernal fiends, discontent, falshood, faction and tumult. This is the way to secure peace on earth, and to diffuse and establish good-will among men. This is the only effectual check to wars and fightings, by chaining down wild ambition, wanton riot, and furious resentment. Consider that a sense of general duty, and a habit of devotion daily encouraged under your own roofs, a delight and advantage not to be sacrificed to libertine scorn, will be the best introduction to an attendance upon public worship. That happy employment

ment of soul and body which in a social view beyond all other acts discovers the excellence of human nature, proclaims its dependence and its gratitude, expresses its faith and hope and joyful expectation, brings it to a peculiarly solemn intercourse with its Redeemer, its Sanctifier, and its GOD ; and makes it as it were, anticipate its future blissful state, when MORTALITY shall be swallowed up of LIFE. Strange ! that a remissness in this respect should be seen among Christians even in a single instance, but stranger still (and most deeply to be lamented) that a neglect of the LORD's Day, that great Day of release, a Day made so memorable, and dear, and interesting (as upon many accounts it is) to mankind, should be grown into a popular habit, insomuch that every idle pretence is thought a sufficient excuse for deserting the service of GOD ; and that portion of time which he most positively claims as appropriate to his divine Majesty, and the purposes of his worship is prostituted with a degree of indecency and seeming unconcernedness ; nay, with an appearance of open contempt and insult, which perhaps no age but our own since the planting of Christianity in this Island

Mand has been degraded by. But if God's command, "Ye shall keep my Sabbaths and "reverence my Sanctuary," is insufficient to prevent and subdue this bad spirit, can it be a wonder that the inferior instruments of his word and will, his ministers, however equal to or intent upon their work, cannot. Nay, it is no wonder, where so much of perverseness has taken place if they, who are most so, should be most neglected. Here then obviously arises a call upon domestic and civil authority to interpose, to teach, to persuade, to correct, to controul, and, above all, by personal example to compel (for this is a desirable compulsion) the loose and profligate, the giddy and unstable, to return to seriousness, to act with consistency "and to walk humbly with their "God." It is surprising that the necessity of this measure should escape them whom it so immediately concerns, respect being had only to their temporal interest. For this is often so connected with spiritual duty and spiritual good, that, if men will rebel boldly against their Maker, they will find punishment following quickly upon it, and indeed often do. What can be the probable consequence of the heads of families desert-
 ing

ing their respective charge and leaving the young and unexperienced, the ignorant and uninformed, and that too at the most critical and dangerous period of life, but, that inlet to all wickedness, SABBATH-BREAKING; and, in course, an intermixing with unfit company, and, by a too easy transition, a surrender of what right disposition there might before be to surrounding temptation and ensnaring attacks. Hence it is that Sunday, that Day of the LORD in a most peculiar sense, is, instead of being kept holy, devoted to rambling, spent in houses, either public or private, of unseasonable entertainment, and often, it is to be feared, in places not merely of dissipation, but debauchery. This evil sadly marks our age, at least locally (within the verge of these great Cities) and is daily productive of mischiefs the most distressing and most fatal. Now, what pretence can there be for thus turning our backs upon God and his worship and (not content with doing so ourselves) inducing others, the succeeding generation, of whom parents and masters and magistrates are the proper guardians, to make shipwreck of faith and conscience and good manners. Health is the only plausible reason for such an impolitic as
well

well as irreligious desertion. But is the health of the body to be attended to in exclusion of the health of the soul? Will such a pretence avail us at the tribunal of our Judge, when not only our own contempt of God's most solemn command shall appear against us, but when others whose temporal and eternal good we trifled with, shall unite in our condemnation, and charge their undoing upon those who ought to have protected them? Think how it was in preceding times, think how it is with some few in this very day? Did THEY or do THESE fare the worse for a regular attendance in their proper places upon the worship of God? Does it appear from such instances that the enjoyment of health and life is incompatible with obedience in this essential point to the divine will? or is there not a fuller security in these and other considerable respects than there can be where all is put to the hazard either from an ill timed pursuit of pleasure or from an affectation of following the multitude to do evil?

This affectation, encouraged by advertisements from money-jobbers (a new species of fatal decoy) as well as calls without number to places of diversion, and loose publications,

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impudently produced, most notoriously pervades all ranks of people, even to the lowest. Dress and pleasurable pursuits engross their whole attention. They are led into expences, which are beyond their ability to support, and, consequently, often exposed by necessities arising from extravagance to the most pernicious evils. One sex is hurried into all the dreadful contrivances which extreme perfidy and villainy can suggest, and the other, regardless of that modesty, which is its first and greatest charm, becomes an easy prey to wanton and artful lewdness. Hence it is that our streets swarm with unhappy prostitutes, abandoned, by degrees, to complicated wickedness, and utter strangers to all sense of principle and of shame. And hence also it is that our property and our persons are neither secure by day nor night; for our roads and our houses are equally infested by daring and desperate invaders. How is a cure to be applied to these abounding mischiefs which are a slow poison working in the vitals of our country? We must look for it in domestic rule, and such an exertion of magistracy and superior authority, as we have long had occasion, and now have, to lament a most destructive relaxation of. Indeed.

deed, it seems, as if these were become obsolete for want of a just sense of that which alone can inspire men with becoming vigilance and fortitude, RELIGION. Right exertion under the influence of this is that which alone can bring us back to order, and, in particular, remedy that fundamental mischief, the scandalous and ruinous profanation of the LORD's Day, which, to the sad reproach of all kinds of government, domestic and civil, discovers itself even at the very hours of public worship. The carriages employed, and the crowds assembling, periodically evince this melancholy truth. The avenues leading to these great Cities, proclaim our apostasy; one in particular, as if by privilege exempt from all superintendence of the magistrate, is distinguished by traffic and uproar.

When will it once be that we shall recover from this romantic madness, this intoxication of extreme folly, this destructive pride of heart? When will it be that we shall give due attention to ourselves, to our offspring, to our dependents? Surely time may be found for all reasonable indulgence without robbing GOD of his honour, and breaking in upon his own established order and appoint-

appointments. A due compliance with these must administer to good in a variety of views. But when was such a compliance ever known to produce evil, to confound property, to squander substance, to bring on bankruptcies, to make disobedient children or dishonest servants? Is it not on the contrary in proportion to its uniform prevalence a common security to all men throughout all ranks and relations, and in every engagement of life? It must therefore be desirable and ought to be emulously our common aim, upon the stated returns of duty to meet together in the house of God as friends who have one grand interest depending, and in prospect an everlasting Sabbath. A total neglect is scandalously profane, and occasional attendances, directed perhaps by other motives than what religion inspires, will not amount to the glorifying God as we ought, in our body and in our spirits; and consequently will not satisfy our own minds under circumstances which must happen to us when Death and Judgment are in view. Oh then that we were wise, that we would consider as well our present interest as our latter end! This would put us under the friendly influence of pure religion. We should studiously avoid,

avoid, and not fantastically affect, a pernicious conformity to the world and its follies. We should so regulate our own conduct, and so attentively provide for right behaviour in others, as both by precept and example, to allure them to regularity and a steady consistent practice, to whatsoever is lovely and of good report. In order to which, it is not necessary that we put on a rigid moroseness, for this is no part of that wedding garment required by CHRIST, but that we qualify ourselves by guarding against, and by subduing, what is wrong, by shunning, as far as our safety requires, the vanities, and keeping ourselves unspotted from the vices of the world, by an external deportment, and by an internal frame, to serve the LORD in fear and to rejoice unto Him with reverence. Hence will result a fullness of satisfaction far beyond all which the collective power of inferior gratifications can furnish; and at a time, when dissipation would end in disgust, and all the luxuries of life satiate, we shall find the having been guided by Christian prudence, the having submitted to Christian discipline, the having joined ourselves heartily to God and

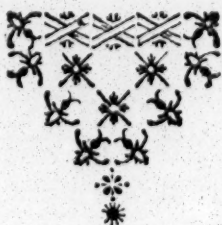
and his service, temporally considered, our strength and stay ; and in an eternal view, our crown of rejoicing, and our exceeding great reward.

Beloved, let me then beseech you by the mercies of GOD, by his mercies more especially in CHRIST JESUS, to look earnestly to those things, with which is connected, socially and personally, your temporal as well as eternal peace, before both are hid from your eyes. Do not let present ease and present pleasure, and the blandishments of sense, or the depraved fashions of the world infatuate your understandings, and bind them down in captivity to indolence or the deceitfulness of sin. But see GOD in his works and hear him in his Word, look at his providences, observe the signs of the times, behold his moral government over mankind, and his kingdom of righteousness in its progress to a glorious consummation ; study his precepts, listen to his warnings, be guided by his counsels, have your loins girt, and your lamps burning. The business of a Fast, you will consider again and again, is not the business of a day, is not a matter of mere formality, but it is, indeed, a most solemn transaction with

with GOD; it is deprecating his wrath, and imploring his blessing and favour: and that upon two implied and indispensable conditions, the sorrowing for your sins and the forsaking them; a return to duty and a steady perseverance in it. It comprehends, most clearly, the praying for deliverance from your enemies politically considered, the enemies of your King and Country, but it comprehends also the praying for a victory over enemies within yourselves, your own evil passions and affections, that GOD who searcheth all hearts, and knoweth what is in man, may graciously extend to you those compassions which fail not, may continue to you those many signal blessings which you do enjoy, but are hardly thankful for, and speedily and lastingly restore that greatest of them all, the BLESSING OF PEACE. Under an earnest hope of your endeavouring to prepare suitably for the approaching Solemnity, and to make that improvement of it which a just sense of religion and the circumstances of the case require, breaking off your sins by righteousness, and your iniquities by shewing mercy to the souls as well as bodies of others, I am induced, with the
most

most profound humility and the sincerest affection, to apply this devout address from a most distinguished earthly king to the KING OF HEAVEN: "What prayer or what supplication shall be made of any man or of all thy people, when every one shall know his own sore and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in thy house, then hear Thou from heaven, thy dwelling-place, and, when Thou hearest, FOR-GIVE."

F I N I S.



(55)

and profound dignity and the highest
of the soul to rise to the level of the
most distinguished and noble of the
of Heaven : When light of wisdom
is given to the mind of any man of
all capacities, when every one shall
be able to see the truth, and the
the world shall be a better place,
the world shall be a better place,
the world shall be a better place.

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